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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: UNIONS PLAN MAY 1 MARCH; MORE STRIKES MAY FOLLOW IN MID-MAY

REF: OUAGADOUGOU 309

11. (U) Key Points:

-- On May 1, national union leaders in Ouagadougou and across the country will hold a march, followed by meetings and rallies, to commemorate International Labor Day and reinforce their protests against the rising cost of living and perceived Government (GOBF) inaction.

-- These planned actions follow a series of organized demonstrations and strikes that began in late February. The most recent was a national strike held on April 8-9, prior to which Government and union leaders met to discuss six demands (reftel).

-- Unions plan to again hold nation-wide strikes on May 13-15 if dissatisfied with GOBF responses to their demands.

12. (U) Key Judgment:

-- Post expects both the May 1 march and meetings and the possible May 13-15 strikes to be peaceful. However, this could change if union leaders lose control of other participants, such as student groups.

End Key Points and Key Judgment.

Unions Plan for Meetings, Rallies, Possible Strike

13. (SBU) In an April 28 meeting, the Deputy Secretary General of Burkina Faso Workers General Confederation (CGTB), Bassolma Bazie, told Poloff that unions will commemorate International Labor Day on May 1 by holding meetings and rallies throughout the country. The union march in Ouagadougou is expected to follow the same route as recent marches, ending at the Prime Ministry, where the coalition will again transmit a list of demands to senior government authorities.

14. (SBU) Echoing union leadership comments made following the April 8-9 strike, Bazie accused the GOBF of an unwillingness to address union complaints and expressed bitterness toward the government statements to the press, which some felt were demoralizing and minimized the success of their strike. Bazie added that the result of these Government statements was that unions were incited to use violence and force against the government to satisfy their complaints.

15. (SBU) According to Bazie, the government announcement to decrease taxes on a number of basic commodities, including rice, has had no positive affect on market prices. Bazie explained that it was now up to the Government to make the next moves, and its inaction would result in nationwide strikes on May 13-15. However, these strikes would not occur if constructive dialogue was held between the two parties.

Unions Denounce Government Inaction and Corruption

¶6. (SBU) Bazie also denounced GOBF actions such as:

-- Corruption among government officials and business owners. Bazie believed GOBF officials have connived with traders to ensure that they receive profits;

-- The creation of policies that benefit business interests at the expense of the general population, such as the decrease or cancellation of taxes on imported items like rice and sugar. Bazie explained that lifting taxes on imported goods that are also produced locally benefited only a minority group of traders (and their Government allies), and gave vendors enormous power over consumers, occasionally hoarding goods until prices normalized.

¶7. (SBU) Furthermore, Bazie called on the GOBF to:

-- immediately decrease taxes on bank loans granted to workers, who complain that they must pay taxes twice: once on the bank loans and a second time on goods purchased using the loan money;

-- encourage domestic agricultural production by subsidizing local producers, as this type of policy will potentially alleviate poverty; and,

-- invest in Burkina Faso's human capital by putting more money into education, and increasing teachers' salaries, and training them.

JACKSON